

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Thursday, February 24th, 2022

Jim Pettinelli (he, him, his)
executive director
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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 5037 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Jim Pettinelli and I work in New Haven and am a resident of Hamden, CT.

I am the executive director of Liberty Community Services in New Haven, we provide housing and homeless services to community members across Greater New Haven. Our organization is a member of the Reaching Home Campaign, the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, and the Greater New Haven Alliance to End Homelessness, I've been working in the field of housing and behavioral health for close to 40 years.

I'm wishing us all good luck during this new legislative session; the coming years are going to be critical to evaluating and supporting the housing needs of our state. I stand proudly with my community partners in the state, to advocate fiercely for what we need to improve the lives of those experiencing homelessness – and that is safe, affordable, and permanent housing. When our neighbors and family members have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. Research has shown - [*Housing is Healthcare*](#).

Over the last two years, COVID-19 aimed a laser focused spotlight on our housing and homelessness system - a shining light on the impactful work accomplished and the amazing talent and resilience of our staff. It has also highlighted how our system over many years has been seriously underfunded and under-resourced for far too long.

As challenging as these last years have been, I believe the coming years offer us the opportunity to build a ***transformational future***. Our system requires additional funding for our essential front-line staff, true progress in developing new affordable housing, and increased service capacity to best meet the needs of those we serve. Our ongoing work together will help make the difference – moving forward at making homelessness, rare, brief, and one time. *Our system continues to be stressed beyond capacity – in Greater New Haven, our system is significantly impacted by challenges to recruit and retain staff – across Greater New Haven at some agencies, turnover has hit 40% this past year. We currently have over 340 households utilizing hotel locations as shelter, compared to 175 last year. And overflow has stalled, we currently have over 170 households that are matched, with rental assistance in hand, but are unable to locate an affordable unit.*

I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services (DMHAD):

- Provide an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (*including \$5.26 million increase in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line, and \$8.08 million at DOH*) to [provide homeless and housing service organizations funding](#) for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology;
- The preservation of DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.404 million;
- Fully support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations funded by DMHAS;
- Fully support the Governor's proposed use of \$2.8 million of ARPA (\$1.1m FY23; \$1.1m FY24; \$562,000 FY25) for [wrap-around services](#) for 150 units of supportive housing. Supportive services are an **ongoing need and require a permanent investment**, and as such we are asking Appropriations to **support an increase** in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line of \$2.25 million in FY23 which will [expand supportive services](#) to 300 scattered site and development units for highly vulnerable individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability.

The pandemic created a roadblock and highlighted limitations, but our system works extremely well and we can make progress in decreasing the number of people who experience homelessness in Connecticut. We have the tools to move towards making homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience by investing in what works - funding for our essential front-line staff, investing in the development of new affordable housing options, and increasing service capacity to best meet the needs of those we serve.

We have seen over the last two years remarkable collaboration and innovative approaches – now is the time to keep that amazing work moving forward – community providers remain on the front-lines with our competent talented staff – with the much needed resources we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and have a home.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Sincerely,

Jim Pettinelli, executive director
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